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SUBJECT: BURKINA FASO: WEST AFRICAN ELECTORAL COMMISSIONS DISCUSS BIOMETRIC TECHNOLOGY FOR VOTER REGISTRATION

¶1. (U) Summary: Burkina Faso's National Independent Electoral Commission (CENI) hosted a three-day workshop for a network of West African States (RESEAO) to discuss the use of technology, specifically the use of mobile biometric technology, in the voter registration processes. The workshop, which was financed by the UN Development Program (UNDP), allowed RESEAO members to share their experiences with using technology to improve the electoral process. Representatives from UNDP, the African Union, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), and the Minister of Technology, participated in the opening ceremony and gave opening remarks to workshop participants and guests. End Summary.

¶2. (U) From October 2-4, CENI hosted a three-day workshop for West African states that are members of the recently established Network of Structures in Charge of Elections in West Africa (RESAO) to discuss the use of technology for voter registration. The event, called "Elections and New Technologies of Information and Communication," was funded by the UN Development Program (UNDP) with a grant of approximately US \$120,000 and focused on the use of information technology to streamline the voter registration and identification process for electoral commissions throughout West Africa. The workshop focused on technology such as biometric information, which could be used as a tool to decrease fraud associated with voter registration.

¶3. (SBU) On October 2, Poloff attended the workshop's opening ceremony in which representatives from UNDP, ECOWAS, and the Minister of Technology gave remarks to workshop participants and guests. UNDP country representative, Rubi Sandhu-Rojon, highlighted the importance of incorporating ease and accessibility into the registration process, while also minimizing the opportunity for people to abuse the transparency of the system. In Burkina Faso, Rojon noted, seven different forms of identification are accepted for voter registration, making the process both accessible to the public and susceptible to fraud. Rojon noted that legitimate electoral systems contribute to the advancement and sustainability of democracy and social peace.

¶4. (SBU) In his opening remarks, Minister of Technology and Information, Noel Kabore expressed the high level of interest by the Government of Burkina Faso in exploring the pros and cons of incorporating biometric and other technologies into Burkina's electoral process. In his capacity as both CENI and RESAO president, Moussa Tapsoba expressed his satisfaction with the progress that Burkina Faso and other countries have made in the collection process they use for electoral lists, particularly in moving from manual lists to alphanumeric systems. However, Tapsoba noted that there is still a great deal of progress to be made. Note. It is worth noting that Burkina Faso's CENI keeps an updated a website, which is not true of many government websites in the county. The website contains public elections information from past elections and other useful information for voters. End Note.

¶5. (SBU) After the opening ceremony, guests were invited to observe demonstrations from technical experts featuring mobile registration kits that took fingerprints and photographs as well as a writing pad to record signatures. These portable stations fold into carrying cases that could be used by elections officials to register voters across the country. One of the technical experts commented to

Poloff that the portable systems are highly useful and secure, and have been implanted in other countries such as Morocco.

¶6. (SBU) Comment: Burkina Faso often lacks the necessary resources to properly complete voter registration such as basic supplies, furniture, and proper offices for registration centers. This kind of mobile registration process could be beneficial to the country, although the GOBF will still need to ensure access to voter registration by citizens in the interior of the country, and will need to be able to support the training and technical expertise necessary for this kind of technology.

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